

A Vision for the Arlandria Neighborhood

Executive Summary

The Arlandria planning effort was initiated in January 2002 following the work of the Upper Potomac West (UPW) Task Force. During their review of the specific recommendations for the Safeway/Datatel sites and the East Reed Avenue properties that were the focus of the Task Force Report, the City Council recognized the need to develop an overall vision for the Arlandria neighborhood and a plan to direct and guide its future development. The Council approved a multi-faceted approach that included the creation of a vision and direction to revitalize the area in the long-term, while identifying immediate community concerns and addressing those concerns in the short and mid-term in order to stabilize and strengthen the neighborhood.

Process

The City manager appointed the Upper Potomac West/Arlandria Work Group (the Committee) to advise and assist the Department of Planning and Zoning staff in the development of the Vision and Action Plans. The Committee met over several months to develop a long-term vision, with design concepts and planning principles, to guide future redevelopment and infill development in Arlandria. The Committee studied the properties most likely to redevelop over the next 20 years as well as other neighborhood factors, including the existing retail pattern, vehicular and pedestrian circulation, and access to Four Mile Run Park. The Committee recognized that properties will likely redevelop over time and that some infill development may occur. Following this analysis, the Committee engaged in a “hands-on” planning process to explore planning concepts for consideration in the creation of the long-term vision for Arlandria.

In addition to the long-term visioning activities, the Committee also worked in smaller residential and commercial subgroups for several months to focus on the immediate needs and concerns affecting those areas. The groups worked with representatives from Planning and Zoning, Transportation and Environmental Services, Code Enforcement and the Police Department to discuss their concerns and to develop solutions and approaches to address the concerns. These solutions are incorporated into the Action Plan.

Vision

The Vision for the Arlandria Neighborhood includes the following common elements:

- the desire for a healthy, mixed use community focusing on redevelopment of three underutilized “opportunity” sites: Safeway-Datatel, the Birchmere and the Mt. Vernon Village Shopping Center;

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- active and viable commercial retail that serves both the neighborhood and the broader community;
- a transition in uses from automobile-oriented to pedestrian-oriented; and
- visual and physical connections to Four Mile Run Park; and a safer environment for pedestrians.

The illustrative plans outline a vision for the long-term potential of the neighborhood. The vision incorporates two major concepts identified by the community:

- Visually opening and enhancing access to Four Mile Run Park by providing better pedestrian and vehicular access to the Park in several key locations, including at the northern edge of the park by Four Mile Run, between the existing Duron Paint and 24 Express properties, and providing connections to the Park from Mt. Vernon Avenue as the Mt. Vernon Village Center and Birchmere properties are redeveloped;
- Optimizing the future development of the three major sites identified as underutilized and “opportunity sites.” The plan envisions the redevelopment of these properties with ground floor retail and entertainment uses, with office and residential uses on the floors above. Structured off-street parking would be faced with active uses. Plazas and other open spaces would be provided.

Design and Planning Principles

The schematic plans provide one approach for directing new development in accordance with the vision. There are other land development configurations that may be undertaken and achieve the same results. The key objective is to incorporate the design concepts and planning principles in new construction to ensure that the long-term vision for the neighborhood is achieved. The major elements included in the design and planning principles are:

- Redevelopment of the automobile-oriented retail uses with pedestrian-oriented retail uses;
- Maintenance of the strong mixed-use land use pattern on Mt. Vernon Avenue with a combination of commercial and residential uses;

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- Enhancement of the pedestrian environment with an improved streetscape with wider landscaped sidewalks, street furniture, and street graphics that provide for gateways to identify the neighborhood;
- Encouragement of new on-site affordable units as new residential construction occurs.

For the redevelopment of the “opportunity sites,” the plan calls for a series of roadways or pedestrian walkways to create typical urban sized blocks. It was recognized that the mass, scale, and rhythm of new buildings should be compatible with the character of the existing urban commercial corridor, with its repetition of smaller storefronts, pedestrian scale, and Art Deco features. Where the commercial district abuts adjacent residential neighborhoods, the plan recommends the transitioning the scale of the commercial development in order to protect, not overwhelm, the neighborhoods.

To define the neighborhood as a distinct area, the plan envisions the creation of an enhanced streetscape with gateways to Arlandria at Mt. Vernon Avenue and W. Glebe Road and at Four Mile Run, open spaces and plazas, and improved pedestrian and vehicular access to Four Mile Run Park are recommended.

The Action Plan

In addition to formulating a long-range plan, with planning and design principles, actions are identified to resolve community concerns. The Plan presents a mix of short, mid and long term actions to address neighborhood problems and to improve the quality of life.

The main community concerns identified include:

- A lack of residential and commercial parking; pedestrian safety, including the lack or inappropriate location of crosswalks and specific problem intersections, especially Mt. Vernon Avenue and Russell Road;
- The desire to make Mt. Vernon Avenue more pedestrian friendly and to improve its appearance;
- The need for better coordination with the neighborhood to solve problems and raise awareness of the appropriate City agencies to contact with problems or concerns;
- Police problems related to car theft, loitering, prostitution, public drinking and vandalism in the community and at Four Mile Run Park.

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Other concerns raised by members of the Tenants and Workers Support Committee include:

- The need for a teen center;
- The need for a medical clinic offering acute/primary care for low-income people and;
- The maintenance of the affordable housing in the neighborhood.

The social needs raised by the Tenants and Workers Support Committee, as well as other social and health care needs of the neighborhood should be considered as part of a City-wide approach to the provision of services and facilities. The recommendations of the action plan focus on actions that may be undertaken to address the community's physical and infrastructure-related problems.

As part of the action plan, the creation of a new retail zone is recommended for the commercial properties located along Mt. Vernon Avenue. The goal of the zone is to help revitalize the area with a mix of uses, including pedestrian scale retail along the street, and by allowing certain uses with standards and providing some flexibility with parking and other regulations that will help to achieve an active urban environment while preserving the integrity of the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Marketing and Retail Strategy

As part of this planning process, a marketing and retail strategy was developed in order to confirm that the proposed long-range vision is feasible from a market perspective, to identify an interim strategy to improve existing businesses and to attract new business, and to strengthen the market over the next five years to encourage the redevelopment of the Safeway-Datatel site.

The study identified the local economic factors, including the opportunity sites, the emerging neighborhood with recent significant residential and commercial development, the central location of the Arlandria area, and the strong market for retail. The existing business district is diverse and strong, with a large walk-in trade, and sales averaging \$286 per square foot, a healthy figure for a neighborhood retail area.

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The Plan includes the niche destination marketing strategy designed to capitalize on the existing strengths of the business district and to attract new businesses. The marketing themes of this strategy include incorporating the concepts of family, health and recreation, and multi-cultural diversity. An important component is building upon the entertainment and restaurant opportunities generated by the location (and clientele) of the Birchmere. Key to the success of the marketing strategy is bringing together the existing businesses to develop as a business organization that will create and implement a marketing and promotions program, plan events, develop consistent business hours and other business enhancement activities. This proactive retail strategy includes public improvements, guidelines/loans to assist business owners with the improvement of their storefront facades, zoning tools and incentives to leverage new private investment, and the marketing and promotions of the business district. The market study and strategy are discussed in greater detail in the latter part of the Plan.

The Plan concludes with a series of implementation measures designed to tie together the planning and design recommendations, the action plan, and the retail/marketing strategy. The measures consist of a series of tasks, with the identification of the agencies or organizations that will be responsible for or will assist in the implementation of the redevelopment, revitalization, and marketing initiatives within the Arlandria neighborhood.